

3 Practice smart watering for healthier plants



Too much of a good thing

Did you know that watering too much or too little is the cause of many common plant problems in our area? You can have healthier plants, save money on water bills, and conserve precious water by learning to give your lawn and landscape just what they need, and no more.

Water deeply, but infrequently.

Most plants do best if the soil is allowed to partially dry out between waterings. In lawns, a loss of shine or footprints showing indicate that it's time to water. Vegetables and other annuals should be watered at the first sign of droop, but tougher perennials (plants that live several years) only need water if they stay droopy after it cools off in the evening. Trees and shrubs usually don't need any watering once their roots are fully established (1 to 3 years).

Moisten the whole root zone.

Watering deeply builds deeper, healthier root systems. To see if you are watering deep enough to moisten the whole root zone, dig in with a trowel after watering to check the depth.

Make every drop count.

Some easy ways to lower water bills and get more water to plants include:

- Build your soil with compost and mulch to hold water and prevent evaporation.
- Choose low water use plants – they can often thrive just on rainfall, once established.
- Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation on beds – they save 50% or more compared with sprinklers!
- Use a timer that screws onto the hose end (available at garden stores) to water just the right amount.



Soaker hoses save water! Cover them with mulch to save even more.

- Water lawns separately from other plantings. Make sure sprinklers aren't watering the pavement too.
- When soil is dry or compacted it won't absorb water quickly. If water puddles, stop watering a while and then restart, so the water has time to penetrate.
- Water in the early morning or evening – if you water at mid-day, half the water just evaporates.



Water in early morning or evening to reduce evaporation.

Use automatic irrigation systems efficiently.

Automatic systems can actually waste lots of water, or be fairly efficient, depending on how you set and maintain them.

- Have a professional test, repair, and adjust your system annually.
- Inspect the system while operating once a month – look for leaks or heads that are plugged or misdirected.
- Install a rain shutoff device (ask your irrigation expert where to find them).
- Adjust the watering schedule at least once a month through the season – plants need a lot less water in May and September than they do in July and August.

Let the rain soak in.

Winter rain rushes off roofs, pavement, and compacted soil. That causes floods downstream, erodes stream banks, and muddies the water, which harms salmon and other wildlife. You can help the rain soak in to slow winter runoff, and help the soil hold the moisture plants need in summer.

- Direct downspouts out into lawns and beds.
- Use compost and mulch to reduce erosion and help rain soak in.
- Use open pavers, gravel, or other pavement options that let rain through into the soil.
- Plant dense strips of native trees, shrubs, and groundcovers next to streams, lakes, and ditches to stabilize the soil, and to slow and filter runoff.

